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**SOME CONTRADICTIONS IN A RICH  
CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT**

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## SOME CONTRADICTIONS IN A RICH CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

### 1. What is development?

It has for some time been standard introductory textbook knowledge in development theory that the attempt to consider development in terms of the level/growth-rate of GDP per capita is both unwise and misleading. Overall growth rates and overall GDP-levels say nothing about the content and the 'distribution of growth. And in addition, a whole range of issues concerning the quality of life in both a material and a non-material sense are left unnoticed by the notion of GDP per capita; e.g., material welfare in the broadest sense, security, freedom and identity for individuals.

This does not mean that levels of GDP in general and the growth rate of GDP per capita in particular has been struck off the list of indicators of development. And economic growth remains, indeed, a central target in Third World as well as in industrialized countries. Accordingly, the "hit-list" of the countries of the world, arranged in terms of GDP per capita, goes on to play a significant role in the debate on issues of development.

In spite of this, the notion of GDP per capita has lost its role as the central term of reference in the discussion on development. A host of research projects have been undertaken in order to arrive at better, richer, and more comprehensive indicators and definitions of development.<sup>1</sup>

These efforts have provided a number of useful instruments for measuring various aspects of a process of development, involving both material and non-material facets. But all this work should not be expected to bring us to some kind of "final" definition of what development is. Development has nothing to do with reaching some type of right answer, made up at the desk of the theorist or anywhere else. There is no final stage in which

individuals and nations can sit back, relax, and call themselves "ultimately developed". Development is a dynamic process, in which individuals and nations manage to solve some problems (e.g. poverty and malnutrition) while creating other problems (e.g. pollution and cardiovascular diseases). Thus, a society which changes status from today's standard picture of a Third World, underdeveloped country, to an industrialized country of the OECD-type, does not end its process of development. It manages to solve some problems and create others in the very same process.

When there can be no "final" definition of what development is, it should be added that there can be no uniform path of development, applicable to all countries. Clearly, different types of countries need different development strategies and the single country invariably changes development strategy over time.

What can we say, then, about concepts and goals of development in a more general sense? We should be able to point out what Björn Hettne has called "indications of what development should imply" (Hettne 1978 p. 7). Certain elements should be incorporated in any process of development, we might say, irrespective of the exact nature of the process of development in a single country or area.

Working in this direction, Galtung (1980) has suggested that the notion of development should include a universal dimension, having to do with the material and non-material needs of human beings. Development may then be said to imply the satisfaction of these needs for individuals and groups in a way that is un-harmful to other people and to nature. Four groups of needs have been identified: welfare (material needs in a broad sense); freedom/rights (as opposed to repression); survival/security (as opposed to destruction); and identity (as opposed to alienation).

I believe that these four groups of needs provide a solid basis for a rich concept of development.<sup>2</sup> The categories are precise enough to be meaningful and vague and open-ended enough to make sure that this is not a step towards any "final" definition of development. The point I wish to make in the following, is that there are serious internal contradictions built into this rich and attractive conceptualization of development. First, however, a few remarks on the nature and urgency of specific development problems in the industrialized countries and in the Third World.

## 2. Development problems in the First and the Third World

Let us take a look at the real world using the rich concept of development as a starting point. Beginning in the industrialized countries, it appears that problems of welfare - at least in the sense of providing people with basic material needs - are largely solved. This is not to deny that there are large or even very large "pockets" of relative poverty in many industrialized countries. We know that according to the U.S. definition, roughly 15 million Americans live below the poverty line. However, when we compare the situation in the First World with the fact that hundreds of million of people in the Third World are subjected to a lack of material needs which directly threatens their lives, then we confirm the picture of a very high level of satisfaction of material needs in the First World.

On the other hand, the non-material aspects of development seem to be suffering in the First World. We could even say that the occupation with material needs tends to turn into an obsession there, an excessive materialism. There even seems to be a positive correlation between the level of material affluence and the degree of emptiness, of lack of meaning in life (cf. the observations of affluent life in the U.S. in Holdt 1984). There is alienation; mental disorders; addiction to drugs (Galtung 1980). And there is insecurity, stemming both from the threats to individuals in their day-to-day lives<sup>3</sup> and from the

levels of capacity of destruction reached through military build-up in the countries of the First World.

This is of course a very broad and general picture of development problems and trends; it is bound to be much more complex when we go into the situations of specific countries and/or groups of individuals. But the intention here is only that of painting a very broad picture. This also goes for the development problems in the Third World of today, to which we turn in the following.

It was indicated above that the main problem in the Third World is that of welfare, of satisfaction of material needs. And of course, the lack of welfare has implication for the other aspects of development. When the lives of human beings are threatened by the lack of food, shelter and other basic necessities, this is also a threat to identity, freedom and security.

In order to solve the material problem, the Third World countries need to produce larger quantities of goods - of material satisfiers of all sorts. And in order to increase production, the forces of production need to be developed - both in industry and agriculture.

This is hardly a very controversial point. But disagreement starts to come in when decisions are going to be made regarding the type, quality, and organisation of productive forces; not to mention the issue of sectoral priorities. There is no intention of settling this debate in what follows. The aim is confined to arguing in favour of the point that some kind of "classical", large-scale industrial production is necessary in order to take care of the welfare (material needs) problem in the Third World.<sup>4</sup>

Industrialization is organized mass-production of goods. If we submit that the welfare dimension of development covers ma-

terial needs that are also of a non-agricultural kind, then there are basic arguments in favour of industrialization in general, and of large-scale, concentrated industrial production in particular. (The following points are based on Kitching 1982 ch. 1).

- 1) The level of prosperity obtainable from agricultural production alone has a definite limit. This is due to the fact that the need of human beings for food is finite, i.e. the income elasticity of demand for food is limited.
- 2) Mass production involves economies of scale.
- 3) External economies arise from the spatial concentration of industry.

Each of these arguments in favour of concentrated industrial production are subject to qualifications. Economies of scale, for example, are only operative in certain industrial sectors; and external economies depend heavily on political conditions and political actions taken to undermine or offset them. (For further discussion, see Kitching 1982 ch. 1). It may thus be debated whether large-scale industry in the huge proportions we know from many industrialized countries is really necessary (cf. for example the objections listed in Hettne 1982 p. 67n). It may also be argued that too much industrialization creates new problems for people and for the environment. Even in the face of this, the suggestion here is that some measure of industrialization, involving both division of labour and so-called modern, advanced technologies, is necessary in the Third World, in order to take care of uncovered material needs. This does not mean industrialization which is an exact copy of the West. It does not mean the disregarding of rural development. The suggestion is that even rural development has to be backed by industry to be effective (Kitching 1982). And there is strong evidence that such a process of industrialization in the Third World has to take place in a socialized, planned economy, in order to avoid unacceptable social and human cost (Kitching 1982 p. 32). But all this does not undermine the central sug-

gestion in the present context: more industrialization is necessary in the Third World.

### 3. Contradictions of industrialization

Industrialization can take care of the material needs incorporated in the rich concept of development; but in the context of doing so, new contradictions are introduced in the process of development. This has to do with the process of industrialization as such; industrialization involves not only more but also less welfare on some counts. In addition, industrialization has effects which makes the realization of the non-material aspects the concept of development more difficult.

A few remarks will be enough to illustrate these points. Looking at the social organisation aspect of industrialization, we know that the process of industrialization creates hierarchy, top-dogs and under-dogs,<sup>5</sup> where the former get a much higher share of the benefits of industrialization than the latter. Many of the under-dogs are getting jobs in industry that are not very desirable. Jobs which, moreover, tend wear people down both physically and mentally. And the level of remuneration tends to be rather low compared with the top-dogs. Conversely, the level of exploitation is often rather high for the under-dogs.

Clearly, for a significant part of the under-dogs industrialization is a mixed treat, creating some basis for the satisfaction of material needs, while at the same constituting a direct threat to welfare in a broad sense.

Having mentioned some general problems of development in the First World above, it might be added here that the treadmill of industrialization seems to have little to offer many under-dogs in the way of identity, security and freedom, although the issues raised by these concepts are not exhausted through



a discussion of industrialization, (cf. Galtung and Friberg 1983).

The planned economies in the Second World have not been able to make fundamental changes in the picture described here. The basic model of industrialization there is imitated from the West, (Hettne 1983) and though the Eastern system fares a little better than the Western one as far as distribution aiming at less inequality is concerned, the system also has the drawback of being much less efficient than the Western counterpart when it comes to productive and innovative activities (cf. Sørensen 1984).

It could be argued that the industrial system of the First World has shown remarkable innovative capacities in overcoming various problems. And there are indications that the present problems can find a solution also, though the outcome is by no means clear at present (Gorz 1983). Solutions depend less on purely technical problems than on the struggle between social forces of society.

On the other hand, many Third World countries are so keen on achieving industrialization as fast as possible that they (i.e. the dominant social forces of the countries in question) seem to be willing to accept very high costs in order to get it. Costs in terms of dependence, exploitation, pollution, etc.

This only serves to stress the fact that the concrete type of industrialization depends on what is feasible and desirable in the single case. Against this background, substantial variations in actual processes of industrialization should of course be expected. But the main point in the present context is that all historical processes of industrialization, however diverse, share the basic contradictions outlined above: firstly, ambiguity on the welfare dimension - providing welfare on the one hand and being harmful to welfare on the other; secondly, industrialization also tends to create

difficulties for the attainment of other goals of development: identity, security and freedom. It was indicated above how this latter problem operates at the level of the single human being. It could also be demonstrated at the level of society, for example how industrialization tends to breed structures which are very complex and vulnerable - easy to harm, difficult to defend - thereby enhancing the insecurity of industrialized society (Hettne 1983). But further elaboration of the contradictions of industrialization are hardly necessary here. Instead, I shall attempt to demonstrate that the welfare aspect of development is not the only aspect haunted by contradictions. On the contrary.

#### 4. Contradictions of security

In the introduction of this paper, it was stated quite briefly that security for individuals and groups should be an element in a desirable process of development. In this section, time has come to admit that this is much easier said than done.

Security is a relative concept which is difficult to define in a precise manner. The intention here is in no way that of providing an exhaustive discussion of the issues and problems of the concept of security. The aim is only to show that the noble goal of development - "security for individuals and groups" - involves serious contradictions. (What follows relies heavily on the excellent contribution made by Barry Buzan (1983 in particular Ch. 1).

If we take the notion of "groups of individuals" to mean states, the decisive contradiction is the one between individual and state security. State security or national security is achieved through strengthening the state against potential internal and external threats. However, the strong state in itself poses a threat to the single citizen. Buzan (1983 p. 25) groups such

threats into four general categories. The first has to do with domestic law making and enforcement. The state can exercise a broad range of powers against its citizens in the name of the common good, from the "neutralization" of individuals considered a threat to the state for one reason or another, to the manipulation of the economy resulting in unemployment, increasing prices, etc.

Secondly, such threats can arise as part of an explicit state policy directed against certain individuals or groups. In highest danger are those seen by the state as dangerous "dissidents" of some kind, cf. Stalin's purges against opponents, Pinochet's hunting down of leftists, etc. Indeed, in most states, various categories of the populations tend to be singled out for some kind of "special treatment".

Thirdly, there is a group of threats arising from political disorder, which in turn has to do with struggle for control over the state's institutions.

"Only a minority of states have developed stable mechanisms for the transfer of political power. In the rest, violent conflicts over the reins of office pose an intermittent, and frequently serious threat to large sections of the population. The archetypes for this situation are countries like Argentina and Bolivia where military factions play an endless game of push-and-shove around the high offices of the state, while at the same time fighting an interminable, and often savage internal war against a variety of mostly left-wing revolutionary groups." (Buzan 1983 p. 26)

Threats to individuals stemming from political terrorism also belong to this category; in addition to constituting a direct threat, terrorism can also have the side-effect of making the security measures of the state more obtrusive.

The final group of threats has to do with the foreign policy of the state. It is an important *raison d'etre* of the state to provide its citizens with some protection against foreign attack or interference. In doing so, however, the state must

impose risks and costs on its people. This can range from measures against individuals in the name of national security, to nuclear deterrence, where "The apparent end of a long tradition of national defence is a situation in which states seek to preserve themselves by offering each other their citizens as hostages" (Buzan 1983 p. 29).

It is not difficult to see that this discussion of the contradictions of security has implications for the other aspects of our rich concept of development. The threat to individuals stemming from the state can of course also be seen as a threat to the welfare, freedom and identity.

But of course the state does more than pose threats to individuals. The state is the single most important provider of security for its citizens. The state provides security against a wide range of threats: physical threats, economic threats, threats to rights, and threats to position or status. (Buzan 1983 p. 19n). And in relation to the other aspects of our concept of development, the state must be seen as an important provider of welfare, freedom and identity for individuals. It is difficult to see how these needs of security can be taken care of without some sort of state structure, (a central problem to political philosophy since the Hobbesian image of individuals in the risky and chaotic state of nature versus the society where much freedom is sacrificed with the erection of a state structure capable of providing some measure of security). And it is even more difficult to envisage the decay of state structures in the present world system. The state is with us, and so is the unavoidable contradiction between individual and state security. The contradiction is "rooted in the nature of political collectives" (Buzan 1983 p. 31).

### 5. Paradise lost: the omnipresence of contradictions

The starting point was a rich and attractive conceptualization of development. From there I have attempted to demonstrate that a rich understanding of development is burdened with serious contradictions. Focus has been on the contradictions of industrialization and security respectively, but it would not be difficult to show the presence of contradictions in the even more ambiguous concepts of freedom and identity.

There is no reason to believe that more sophisticated conceptualizations of development will free us of such serious contradictions. Which means that even if the "right" people with all the "correct" ideas were given all the "necessary" means to produce the "ideal" process of development, their efforts would be haunted by contradictions of the type discussed above. We have a situation, in other words, where the very best is equal to the lesser evil, and where reaching the lesser evil involves striking some balance between contradictions of development. This observation might be commonplace, but important, nonetheless, in a time where the debate on development is filled with joyful and brightly coloured alternative proposals intended to solve the present predicament in both the First and the Third World.

On the other hand, there is still room for support of an attractive and rich conceptualization of development - as a vision. And within the context of this vision there is plenty of room for improvement of the life of human beings in both a material and a non-material sense. Evidently, the existence of contradictions does not mean that measures towards a better life in one or the other part of the world are impossible. It "only" means that such measures must be conscious of, and ready to strike a balance between, the contradictions of development. In this context, it is relevant to say a few words on the issue of how concrete strategies of development are made up.

## 6. The making of a strategy of development

Theorists of development would like to think that their considerations form the basis of operational development strategies. And ideally, any strategy should rest on theoretical considerations, in the same way that a diagnosis has to be made before writing a prescription. But we know that there are many different theories. And even when there is agreement on a theory, this need not apply to strategy. The same theory can serve as basis for different strategies, in the same way that the same diagnosis can lead to different prescriptions.<sup>6</sup>

Even in this confusing situation, we know that most developing countries have followed a few, quite similar strategies of development. This is due to the fact that Third World countries seldom are able to make up a development strategy of their own choice. Most of these countries "began" as colonies, subjected to European masters. European traders and industrialists were interested in exotic goods and raw materials from the colonies, to further economic growth in Europe. And the social structure of the Third World in this era was dominated by a small group of wealthy land- and mine-owners. It was the collaboration between these dominant social forces of the time in both the First and the Third World which determined that the "development strategy" of the Third World countries consisted export of raw materials and import of manufactured goods.

The decisive issue is the same now as it was then: the strategy of a specific country has to do with the dominant social forces and the interests represented by these forces, much more than it has to do with abstract theoretical considerations. In most Third World countries today, the dominant bloc of forces consists of landowners and industrialists from both local and foreign firms. And it is most often these forces who decide the concrete strategy of development, with very little influence given to workers and peasants, not to mention the masses of unemployed and marginalized.



To change a path of development into "something better" then, requires struggle, compromise, and time. Struggle, because fundamental changes of strategy cannot be expected without changes in the configuration of social forces deciding the strategy. Without more power to "ordinary people", these people cannot expect a bigger say in deciding the development strategy. Compromise, because one single faction can never expect to decide a strategy alone (except in brief periods under special circumstances); there will always be a bloc of various forces involved. Time, because fundamental changes in society are not made in a few years, or even in a single decade. More than one generation is the realistic time-perspective for such changes.

#### 7. Development in the short and in the long run

Rich concepts of development are bound to be complex, ambiguous and haunted by contradictions. That can make them dangerous tools in the hands of minority groups pursuing their self-interests. A ruling group always attempts to portray its policies as something in the interest of all groups in society, even when such policies benefit only a small minority. A concrete strategy of development is most often also a piece of development-ideology. And the more complex "the goal" the easier it is to misuse it in the service of ideology. To take one example: the various types of measures that governments can take against people in the name of "national security", cf. the discussion about contradictions of security above.

This means that rich concepts of development need some down-to-earth, operational specifications in order to become useful for changes in the "correct" direction in the short run. In other words, a spelling out and setting of priorities for necessary actions in different environments. A vague beginning of this task was undertaken in section two, where the most urgent problems in the First and the Third World were identified. And it is probably possible to proceed somewhat further along this

path of setting short-term priorities. But basically, these efforts should be directed by the people subjected to the concrete process of development. The theorist can present no final solution here.

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### Notes

- 1) But it has been a somewhat surprising find of recent analyses that there seems to be a close correlation between the level of monetary GNP per capita and the substantive indicators of welfare and well-being (Sheenan & Hopkins 1979). However, further analysis is required to identify the precise relationships and in any case, these results do not mean that critique against the use of the GNP-measure is unwarranted.
- 2) There is no reason to hide that the four elements in this concept are inspired by - or even "created" by - the experience of development in the industrialized West. Thus, any definition of development, however rich, is always closely related to the socio-historical context in which it is put forward. This is as it should be; there is no attempt in the following to exclude a discussion of development problems based on other socio-historical contexts than the one employed here.
- 3) One recent example is the much debated Bernhard Goetz-incident in the New York subway.
- 4) The following remarks on this issue reiterates the points made in Sørensen 1985A.
- 5) The categories are meant to be broader than, but also related to, the categories of bourgeoisie and proletariat. A thorough discussion of definition is deemed unnecessary here.
- 6) See Sørensen 1985B.

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